

Mr. Nordenfelt could not come to visit him, for he was ill and confined to the house. Kirstin read and repeated hymns to him sometimes; whether he heeded them or not she did not know. One day he said, "My coffin is ready." With the usual forethought of a Jutland fisherman, he had ordered and paid for it at the beginning of his illness. That night he said suddenly, "Kirstin, I shall tell your mother you are her true daughter—you have done your duty by me—if our Lord will let me," he added. "She was a real good woman—far better than I." Then after a pause, "Tell Morten I was sorry."

"Oh, father! he will be sorry," she began, but her voice failed her. "He loved you," she faltered out.

"God bless you, child!" he said again. "All my plans have failed; but I don't fear for you. Your mother was a good woman, and you are like her. Now go to bed: I will call you when I want you."

Kirstin accordingly lay down on the little bed beside her father's, for she knew he loved obedience better than any kind of service. Her father's voice never called her again.

*(To be continued.)*

## A NIGHT IN THE BUSH.



AN is never contented with his lot. When people say this, they always mean to say that they themselves are of an especially discontented disposition.

If you read my last paper, "Rather a Long Walk," you will remember that I had just reached a cotton plantation, and that I liked the employment there very much; but this liking did not last very long, and I soon began to get tired, and wish for a change of scene. The miseries of travelling were even forgotten; and I thought to myself, "though shepherding is rather lonely, I am sure it is much better than this." So one day I started up the "Bush" again, to look for a job "among the gum-trees."

It was now the shearing time, and as many shepherds had left their employment to go shearing, I had not much difficulty this time, and I was soon "made overseer to two thousand grass-cutters," as the Irish shepherd wrote home to his mother.

A wonderful place is that wild Bushland; wonderful for its extent, wonderful for its sameness, wonderful for its loneliness. Scattered here and there, solitary shepherds wander day after day with no other company but their own thoughts, the sheep, and the gum-trees; and yet the "Bush" is full of life—birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and insects, all rejoicing in the bright life which the glorious sunshine gives them.

In England we talk of the stillness of night, but in the "Bushland" it is noon alone that is really still. At sunrise and sunset the parrots fly in glittering flocks from tree to tree, hanging to the boughs in bunches, upside down, anyhow, and feeding on the seeds which grow there for their food. The magpie whistles his musical scale of four notes, and the laughing jackasses laugh in triumph over some deadly snake of whom they intend to make a meal. But at mid-day all these sounds are hushed—so hushed that a man's footfall seems to echo among all the trees. If a seed-pod or a leaf drops, you may hear it rattle from bough to bough until it gains the ground. With life all around, above, beneath you, there is now the silence of death: stay, there is one sound—if sound it may be called—which, coming with the noon, never ceases until the breath of evening seems to waken Nature from her slumber. It is a ceaseless, monotonous, whining sound, something like the singing of a gigantic kettle—a wearisome, indescribable noise, which really seems to heighten the silence by contrast, a sound which suggests the idea of Nature singing her children to sleep. It is all-pervading, you cannot trace it, and yet you fancy that the author must be close by. If you ask a shepherd what is the cause of this noise, he will answer "locusts." This name will do well enough for the creatures. They are, however, I believe, a kind of cricket, or cicada, and their song is produced by the motion of their wings.

But it was about a night in the "Bush" that I intended to write when I set out, and therefore I will let the locusts alone for a while. As I think of night in the Bushland, I always recall one particular night, which I passed in the open air some years ago, and which I will now try to describe.

Well, then, to begin. I was at that time a shepherd up in the north of Queensland, and my hut was a long way from any place where white men lived.

They used to send me out "rations" of tea, flour, beef, sugar, &c.,

about once a week, and I very seldom saw any one, except the man who brought them, from one week's end to the other.

Sometimes I did not even see *him*, for he would come while I was out with the sheep and take away the empty bags, leaving the full ones.

When I had been living thus for about three months, another hut was built about three miles off from mine, and a shepherd was placed there with another flock of sheep.

Then I used to get company sometimes, for we used to feed our flocks towards one another, and then walk on and meet between them, and gossip all through the heat of the day.

This was not at all an educated man, mind you, but I found him very good company for all that (perhaps because I could not get any other). He had been a great many years in the country, and had, I believe, been transported when a boy; but he was none the worse for that in any one's opinion—for the people in the colonies do not consider a man to be utterly worthless because he happens to have been found out once in crime and punished. It is an odd thing, but these people generally turn out to be the best and honestest men in the colonies. I am quite sure, however, that this man had not been transported for anything very wicked, or, at all events, that he must have had a great deal of good in him; and, as I said, I am not sure that he had been transported at all.

At any rate, I saw a great deal of him during six months of my life, and in all the talking that we did together, I never heard him say anything bad or wicked; and we all know that if a man is really wicked he is sure to be caught talking wickedness some time or other. He was full of stories of danger and adventure, some taken from his own life, others from his experience; and, altogether, he was a very amusing companion, and I learnt many things from him that I never knew before.

We used to sit in the day time on a high ridge of ground, where we could see both ways, and there pass some hours very pleasantly; only we had to be always on the alert to keep our two flocks from mixing, which they were very anxious to do.

He first taught me how to use an axe properly without wasting my strength and tiring my arms, and showed me how to find and cut out "sugar bags," and to catch ducks by the legs in the waterhole,

and to provide many delicacies as substitutes for the dry beef and "damper."

After a while we made a compact to visit one another's huts on alternate nights, and sit and converse together after we had "yarded" our sheep.

This came to be a regular thing at last. So every evening I used either to sit and wait for his footfall, or else (having first tied up my dog at the yard-gate) I used to start for a three-mile walk, and all for what? Just for the sake of having an hour or two's conversation with a fellow-man.

Sometimes I think of this, when I am compelled to pass a long evening in a hot room full of people just as uncomfortable as myself, and all trying to look happy. At such a time even I feel that it is better to have too much company than too little, though I certainly would not walk "six miles there and back" to go to an "evening party," or to the noisiest and most expensive concert that was ever listened to. Soon after we made this agreement, however, the rainy season set in—for in Queensland they get all their rain at one time—lasting about a month; and then the sun shines, without a cloud, all the year round, until the rainy season comes again. This happens about Christmas.

One evening—it happened to be Christmas Eve, of all nights in the year, only I did not know it then—I made up my mind that I wouldn't stand it any longer. I had had no company for about ten days, for when it rains in Queensland "it does rain, and no mistake about it," as the colonists say; and I had kept the sheep as close to the hut as I could. However, on this particular evening it didn't rain quite so heavily as usual, so I thought I could go and see Jem (I knew him by the name of Jem, and he always knew me as George). All day long a pall of cloud had hung over the "Bush," and the rain had roared steadily among the branches. My hut was streaming with water inside and out. A hard matter to keep a fire lighted in such weather, but I had sundry hollow trees smouldering from which I could always obtain the seeds of fire.

The day had seemed horribly long; dozens of hours seemed to pass, and still the same leaden day, the same downpour of rain, and not a sign of evening. At last I thought it must surely be time to put the sheep in the yard, for if the night came on without warning, and found

the yard empty, I should have had a great deal of trouble to fill it; so, although my charge seemed strangely reluctant, I folded them all carefully, tied up the dog, and started.

It did not get dark until just as I reached a place where I could hear Jem shouting to his sheep as he guarded them. I soon reached the hut, and he was very glad to see me. I had not stopped to have supper before starting, as I did not wish to waste the remaining daylight in the toil and trouble of lighting a fire. We were soon seated at supper in the hut, with the mosquitoes stinging us through our shirts. We were both of us, of course, wet through, as we had been more or less for the last ten days, it being quite impossible to keep anything dry, even for a change. But we thought little of that at that time. I think I feel it sometimes now, though, in my bones. I wonder whether Jem does! Jem knew that it was Christmas Eve—the overseer had told him—so, after supper, we fell to talking about Christmas at home and abroad, each relating bits of his experience. I may tell you some of Jem's tales some day. (I constantly in these papers find myself giving pledges of this kind; I hope I shall be able to redeem them all.) Presently we made a fire in the hut, of logwood, which vanquished the mosquitoes, but nearly smothered us in smoke.

Jem lighted the "slush-lamp," and read me a piece out of a tattered copy of "Charles O'Malley," and we laughed together, and I was exceedingly loth to go; but at last, after much "thinking about it," and shuddering, I had to "turn out." I think it must have been about eleven o'clock.

A "slush-lamp" is made in this way. You take an old tin jam-pot, and bore a hole in the bottom; you then wind any bits of old cotton rag round a stick, and insert it in the hole like a mast, and fill up with melted fat. The cotton then acts like a wick, and the whole, when well made, gives a tolerable light. But there is a great art in making "slush-lamps."

Jem's last words to me, as I passed out into the darkness, were, "Mind you don't lose yourself, old chap." I replied, "Never fear;" and the light and Jem and all were speedily out of sight.

*(To be continued.)*

## THE OLD RED PRAYER BOOK.

*By the Author of "Daisy's Companions."*



NE can see at a glance what a beautiful book it must once have been. Although so worn and battered now, it is easy to imagine what a lovely colour it was, and how bright the golden lines down each side and the golden bands and lettering at the back, when it was put, spick and span new, into its first owner's hands. So strong too! Why I should be afraid to say how many smart modern books it has outlived already! To be sure, the paper never could have been *very* first-rate, and the print is small, and all the s's are f's, the children say, but outside, it was doubtless perfectly lovely.

Has it a history, do you ask? Of course it has! *Everything* has a history; you have one yourself, for that matter. If the old red Prayer Book could only be induced to speak, I wonder whether its story would be at all like this.

One soft spring Sunday Letty went to church for the first time. That is, she was carried there; she would have found it hard to walk that day—even if the tiny feet ever *had* walked yet—for the long christening robe with its eighteen tucks and eighteen strips of insertion would have been sadly in the way. Letty's godfather was there, of course, and when they were all come back from church he gave her a new red Prayer Book. Not that Letty could take it, the little fingers were of no more use than the feet in those days, and she was just then being held comfortably on her father's two hands as he walked about the room dancing her gently up and down, trying to win one of her baby smiles, and quite regardless of the laughter of the company as they sat eating cake and drinking Letty's health—not caring the least, in fact, whether they laughed or not.

When the company were all gone Letty's mother took up the Prayer Book.

"I will keep it for her," she said; and she placed the blue ribbon marker at the Christening Service: "that is the first story I shall tell my little Letty," said the mother; "the story of to-day."

Time went on, and by-and-by little Letty grew big enough to stand at her mother's knee and hear the story of her own christening, listening to it eagerly, her big blue eyes staring up into her mother's face

and her little mouth wide open. It became a regular thing that Letty should hear that story every Sunday, and the first place the child learnt to find in the red Prayer Book was the place where the blue ribbon marked the Christening Service.

More time had passed, and Letty might be seen trotting between her father and mother to church, the Prayer Book held fast in both hands; but for all that getting many a fall as they went along. It was then that the gilt edges first became rubbed, and the brilliant colour dulled. The blue marker was moved now; Letty liked to be able to find the only prayer she knew, so it was placed near the beginning of the book, where the child learnt by the great round O to distinguish the words "Our Father." In church she sat on a hassock at her mother's feet, sometimes finding her place and pretending to read busily, at other times kneeling down and whispering "Our Father" to herself without at all caring whether the congregation happened to be repeating it just then or not. When the organ played and the hymns were sung the child stood up upon the seat and smiled with delight as she tried to sing too in her own childish fashion, for no one had ever told Letty that church was a place where little ones like her must not dare to smile when they feel happy. At sermon time she sat on her papa's knee, and generally fell fast asleep with her head on his shoulder: sometimes, I must say, she fidgetted a good deal first, but they were patient with her, for no one wanted her to be perfectly miserable, and it often is perfect misery to a child to sit *quite* still long together. As she grew older of course she behaved more like other people; only when tired of trying to attend she shut the red book softly and sat still on her hassock until she felt able to try and join again in the service. What with the beautiful music that she loved, and her nice naps in sermon time, and words familiar to her at home that she listened for, smiling as she recognised them, and her own little whispered prayers, and her dear red book—what with all this, and with no thought at all of stiffness and constraint, but only a thought of loving reverence which grew and strengthened in her little heart, it was one of Letty's greatest joys to go to church, and Sunday was the happiest day in Letty's week.

By-and-by the blue ribbon was moved a little further on, to a place where the print was smaller, for Letty had grown old enough to stand up with her hands behind her and say the Catechism. The marker remained a very long time in that place. Look, and you will see how

thumbed and worn is the page. The corners of the book too began to show signs that Letty was apt to nibble them as she learned; and as for the back!—if it had not been a really well-bound Prayer Book, certainly it would never have survived those days at all.

After that the child was sent to school. I don't know why; I can tell you nothing of the parting, of the tears that were shed, of how her parents missed her or how she felt as if her heart would break at leaving them. Remember, if you please, that it is not Letty's history, but that of the old red Prayer Book that I am relating—of the child herself I only know what the book knew.

Things were very different at school as far as the Prayer Book was concerned. You may have noticed pencil marks at intervals half way through the Psalms? The blue ribbon kept company with them, and they show to this hour the length of Letty's tasks. Sometimes the pencil has evidently given quite a spiteful dig into the page; that was when the tasks were doubled on account of being imperfectly repeated, and on those occasions the child spent her Sunday afternoon in tears; one can here and there see how the hot drops blistered the page. At church the square pew seemed all eyes. If Letty raised hers for an instant she met those of the teacher sternly reproving, or of one of the young ladies looking all astonishment at her daring to be such a naughty child as to suffer her glance to wander from her book. The seats were so high and narrow that trying to keep her balance—for she was not allowed a footstool—was a perfect strain upon Letty's mind, and when, as sometimes happened, she *couldn't* keep it, and stumbled forward, her misery was complete. She knew too well what would happen! Long and wearisome as she generally found the sermon, it was far too short that day; too short also was the walk home—so intensely did the child dread the sharp box on the ear she was fated to receive at the end of it. During the remainder of the service, Letty, unable to resist glancing from time to time at Miss Low's hard hand in its green kid glove, turned quite sick at the thought of how it would come with a sound smack against her poor little face by-and-by.

On hot Sunday afternoons, when the air was heavy and every one felt drowsy, matters were if possible still worse. No resting of a tired head on papa's shoulder, no safe low seat at mother's knee; but when the weary eyelids drooped, and the eyes actually shut, Letty was stood up upon the seat, the observed of all observers; for standing there she could of course see and be seen by all the congregation, even



over the high green baize walls of the pew. If little Letty had looked about her then she might have felt surprised to notice how many people *were* asleep in different parts of the church, comfortably asleep in corners, with no one to interfere with them or set *them* up on seats! Grown-up people too! But Letty never did look about her; she felt



far, too ashamed and miserable for that. I think the worst scrape of all the many scrapes the child got into was on one unfortunate Sunday, when she told the young ladies that she rather began to think she did not want to go to Heaven! The case was this. They had been learning that hymn of Dr. Watts's about church-going, in which occur the lines:

"I have been there, and still would go;  
'Tis like a little Heaven below."

"If Heaven is like the church *we* go to," says Letty, "I *think*—yes, I do think I'd rather stop on earth."

Of course this was such a dreadfully wicked speech that there was nothing to be done but to give the culprit a long task, and when it was learnt send her supperless to bed. That is the place where there is such an indignant, angry-looking black pencil mark in the old red Prayer Book; but soon after this the marks cease altogether. That was because the holidays were come and Letty went home. She never went back to school any more either. I fancy her father and mother found out, from the child's innocent prattle, many things of which they had before had no idea; at all events they kept her at home, and in good time too; for not only was she beginning to dislike Sunday, but almost to hate the sight of her old friend, the Prayer Book.

However, when once more in her own happy home she soon began to love it as well as ever, and for a year or two the blue ribbon travelled happily backwards and forwards through the Psalms, as Letty read them each day with her parents, at the end of which time she went to church dressed, for the second time in her life, all in white. Her father and mother went too, and prayed for their child, and the old Prayer Book went too, with the marker in it at the Confirmation Service. And there the marker stayed, for they had given the young girl a *new* book, all white and gold, with gilt edges and a gilt cross on the side, so she took the new Prayer Book with her when she went to church, and it was out of that she read the Psalms daily. As for the old book, it lived upstairs in Letty's little room with the marker still in the same place, the red colour faded and the gilt on the edges almost gone. But when Letty was sick or sorry, then she loved to read from it; the smart new friend never came upstairs—that was for church-going and public life; the old friend of her childhood was for hours of grief or of illness.

But there came a day when Letty was neither sick nor sorry, and yet stole away by herself to her little room to read in the old red Prayer Book. Before she took it down from the shelf she locked the door, and when she opened it her cheeks were rosy—almost the colour of the book in its best days; and the blue ribbon was moved at last from the place it had kept so long. Letty put it in this time at another service; she read that service with glowing cheeks, looking round timidly now and then to make sure that no one saw her. How *could* they see her, when she had locked the door?

Very soon after that the girl dressed once more in pure white, as on her Christening and her Confirmation day; but this time she wore a

wreath of orange blossoms on her head, for little Letty was going to be married!

When she left her first home the red Prayer Book left it too, and then it was that it became more worn than ever, for it seemed so much a part of the old life and of the old home that Letty used it constantly; and in the course of time the blue ribbon travelled all the way back to the place it had marked at first, back to the Christening Service, for Letty had babies of her own to take to church. The children as they grew up had, of course, Prayer Books of their own; but when they were in trouble about anything, they liked best to read in "the mother's book," and in all their childish illnesses the sight of the old faded cover was familiar to them as the mother read at their bedsides.

"It is so strange," said the children; "such queer old hymns; and the prayers for the Queen all wrong! Who is Queen Adelaide?" they asked; "and why is there nothing about the Princess of Wales and the royal children?"

"The royal children are mentioned," said the mother.

But no; those she called "children" were so no longer, but grown-up men and women with families of their own; for time, like the blue ribbon, had travelled on, and, *unlike* the ribbon, had never once turned back upon his road.

At last there came a time when the old red Prayer Book never left the mother's room. It lay always on a little table by her side, and she liked to hear her husband read from it. Now and then—perhaps because of the bad print, or because something had dimmed his sight for a while—he said he could not see to read it well, and bowed his head upon his wife's pillows—to rest his eyes, he said, they pained him rather. The children came in softly one by one, and the mother, with her wasted hand upon the book, spoke gently to them. She told how the red Prayer Book had been to her—as their Prayer Books must be to each of them—a life-long friend, from the cradle to the grave; and then with her own hand she moved the ribbon for the last time, and no one moved it after that any more at all: they left it where she had placed it, in the Burial Service; and it is there still. There is no colour in the ribbon now, it is quite faded, and the book is old and shabby, the print bad, and all the s's are f's, but still, in their heart of hearts, the children love it—still, when they are ill or in trouble, they beg the father to lend them "mother's old red Prayer Book."